

U.S. Congress  
Energy and Commerce Committee

June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2015

By David G. Howley

Good morning ladies and gentleman. I want to take a moment to thank you for the opportunity to address the committee on this important topic. My name is David Howley. I am a retired NYC Police Officer who has battled a host of ailments, including cancer caused by the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. I am now considered permanently disabled because of those ailments.

As much as I do not like talking about myself, I feel in this case I must, in order to provide you with a firsthand experience on how, from its early inception until today, the 9/11 Health Care Program has helped thousands of people just like myself. My case is not the exception to the rule. In a way, I believe, I am the poster child for the unique work Dr. Udasin and her colleagues do every day. Please bear with me while I try to tell you the short version of my experience, and I believe you will be able to see exactly why the extension of this law is so important.

I first went to Dr. Udasin in 2003 when the program was called the Medical Monitoring Program. I am sure I was not her first patient in the program, but I was one of the first. At that point, I had severe high blood pressure, a sinus condition that was horrible, constant heart burn and breathing difficulties from a reduced lung capacity. I had frequent sinus infections and was living on antibiotics and antacids.

I was such a mess, (to put it mildly), that on first visit Dr. Udasin refused to let me leave unless I went straight to my own doctor to get treated for the high blood pressure. There were some follow up tests,

conferences, and our Doctor- Patient friendship was born. I received treatments for those conditions and actually started to feel human again.

Fast forward to 2006 where I found a lump in the side of my neck, but I did not think much of it. However I showed it to my regular doctor during a routine visit. He thought it was just a cyst and not a big deal, but it should be removed when possible- NO RUSH. I messed around trying to find a surgeon for almost a year. The lump was pretty close to my jugular vein and since I had never been operated on, and had no idea what to expect, I was being extra careful. Dr. Udasin recommended several surgeons at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital. Finally in March of 2007 I settled on a great surgeon who extracted what was not a cyst, but a cancerous lymph node. The odyssey had begun.

I was diagnosed with squamous cell head and neck cancer that had metastasized into my neck. From that point on the cancer has returned on three separate occasions, the last time being in March of last year, when I had to undergo a full radical neck dissection. I have also been through chemotherapy and radiation treatments, and suffered two strokes. One of which was a direct result of the cancer treatment. After the stroke in 2008 I pretty much refused to go back for any treatment for almost a year. Dr. Udasin and her staff worked tirelessly to find and research the group of doctors I now have. I have the best group of doctors any person could possibly want. No one really figured I would survive this long. But with the help of this program there is no question in my mind that if it were not for the 9/11 Health Care Program and Dr. Udasin in particular, I would not be sitting here in this chair today.

Now I'm boring you with all this for one reason. What happened on September 11, 2001 with concern to the mixture of concrete, glass, chemicals etc. plus the fire at temp over two thousand degrees had

never before occurred in history. As a result, the illnesses and cancers that have occurred had not previously been seen by the medical community. In my opinion, the 9/11 Health Care Law has allowed Dr. Udasin and other doctors in the program to perform imperative research and become experts in this field. They have the knowledge, skills, tools and expertise to guide patients like myself through a very difficult process. There is no question the doctors in this program have saved countless lives of Police Officers, Fireman, medics and others.

### HEALTH CARE COSTS

As you are all aware health care costs can be astounding. For a family fighting a life threatening disease it can be overwhelming. After my last surgery, a single night's stay in a hospital room alone cost more than \$5,000. Thankfully, I have very good insurance and the left over costs were picked up by the 9/11 Plan. Thanks to the 9/11 Plan, my out of pocket expenses were less than \$300. However, I am very fortunate to have the health coverage I have, while others are a lot less fortunate. The 9/11 Health Care Plan allows people with life threatening and non-life threatening diseases peace of mind, and the opportunity to concentrate on getting better without having to worry about selling their house to do so.

### WHY

As member of Congress one of your highest responsibilities is to protect and defend the citizens of the United States of America.

On September 11, 2001 the United States of America was attacked. On that day we began the war on terrorism and Al-Queda. Whether we say we are, or are not at war today, is a political discussion not a practical one. The men and woman who worked tirelessly, day and night at the towers and then became sick have every reason to expect their country will provide

assistance to them, the same way they provided assistance and protection to the people of the New York City. It is your obligation as Congress to fulfill that expectation. We were the front line troops that day, and in the weeks thereafter. Ninety eight percent of the people in the towers got out safely that day. A near impossible feat that was done with skill, determination and raw courage.

Unfortunately terrorism has not been defeated and there is no reason to think it will be in the near future. As we sit here today I can guarantee that emergency responders are training to deal with the next terrorist attack. Whether it's a lone gunman in a shopping mall or a group attempting to place an IED in a city business district.

Members of Congress, at this point you must think into the future. If future first responders have to worry about what comes after the next attack, will they have medical coverage, will their families be assisted and provided for should they die? Along with the rest of the concerns that people like me have gone through. You have to ask yourself will they be willing to give the same one hundred percent that we all gave? Will they do their jobs with the same determination and strength, and give their all the way we all did on the days and weeks after September 11<sup>th</sup>?

You have all seen in recent months how shootings and homicides have risen in major cities around the country. Police officers are not being as active since all of the unrest and abuse they have been under. Again I'm not speaking about politics, I am speaking about reality. Police officers, are and rightfully so taking a step back and assessing, am I going to be supported if I take police action? This is the same process you do not want them to have to think about should another major terrorist attack occur. You want our first responders to have confidence that their country has their back, and they will be assisted if and when they need it.

#### Victims Compensation Fund

What I would like to say about the fund is that I believe that Congress should fully fund the Victims Compensation Fund, so recipients can stop waiting for their awards. These funds help families and individuals with the day to day

expenses they lost during their illnesses, and make up for lost wages if they are unable to work. Having to wait an unknown periods of time for their awards just adds stress to the lives of people who have had more than enough already.

## Conclusion

I want to thank you all for inviting me here today. I believe everyone here has their hearts in the right place, and wants to do the right thing. This should in my opinion be a no brainer. There is no reason not to do this and many reason why this law should be extended.

Thank you for your time and dedication in this matter.